



JUVENILE JUSTICE MATTERS



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Juvenile Arrests in New Jersey, 2002

The NJ State Police recently released its 2002 Uniform Crime Report (UCR) which provides information on reported crime and arrests. Despite the well-known limitations of using arrest data to reflect law-breaking behavior, UCR data still provide the best measure available to the juvenile justice community.

According to UCR arrest statistics, there were 63,886 juvenile arrests in 2002. Of these, 20% were for Index offenses (generally the more serious offenses), including 15% for property offenses (burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft), and 5% for violent offenses (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault).

The Most Common Offenses

The ten most common offenses for which juveniles were arrested in 2002 (not counting curfews and runaways) accounted for 65% of all juvenile arrests. These offenses included: drug abuse violations (contributing 11%), larceny-theft, which includes shoplifting (11%), disorderly conduct (10%), simple assault (9%), criminal/malicious mischief (6%), liquor law violations (5%), and burglary, receiving/possessing stolen property (often auto theft related), aggravated assault, and weapons offenses (3% each).

Where Do Juvenile Arrests Occur?

While juvenile arrests occur throughout the state, a disproportionate share are in select counties and urban areas, particularly for the more serious and violent offenses. Seven counties (in order of magnitude: Camden, Essex, Mercer, Bergen, Monmouth, Passaic and Hudson), with 50% of the state's youth population in 2000, accounted for 57% of all juvenile arrests in 2002. More than two-thirds (68%) of all juvenile arrests for violent Index offenses occurred in the counties of Essex, Hudson, Camden, Mercer, Passaic, Monmouth and Atlantic (with 44% of the youth population). In addition, 58% of juvenile drug arrests were in Essex, Hudson, Camden, Monmouth, Bergen, Passaic and Union (with 52% of the youth population).

Our six most populated cities (Camden, Elizabeth, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson and Trenton) contained 11% of the NJ population in 2000. Yet, these cities combined to account for 23% of all juvenile arrests, 30% of arrests for violent Index offenses, and 27% of all juvenile drug arrests in 2002. Significantly, these six cities accounted for 59% of arrests for *drug sales*. Newark and Jersey City alone combined to account for 18% of the arrests for violent Index offenses, and 16% for drug offenses (including 42% for drug sales).

Arrests by Gender, Race/Ethnicity & Age

Gender. In 2002, males continued to account for a large majority of juvenile arrests and a greater proportion of arrests for violent Index offenses (i.e., murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault). Male youth accounted for 75% of all juvenile arrests, and a higher share of arrests for violent Index offenses (84%), and drug arrests (88%).

Race/Ethnicity. With regard to race, White youth (Non-Hispanic and Hispanic) accounted for 57% of all juvenile arrests. They also accounted for 56% of arrests for Index offenses, 40% for violent Index offenses, and 59% of drug arrests (but only 29% of arrests for drug sales). African American youth accounted for 42% of all juvenile arrests. They also accounted for 43% of Index arrests, 59% of violent Index arrests, and 40% of drug arrests (but 71% of arrests for drug sales). Asian and American Indian youth accounted for the small remainder of arrests. With regard to ethnicity, Hispanic youth accounted for 16% of all juvenile arrests, 16% of Index arrests, 17% of violent Index arrests, and 11% of drug arrests (and 12% of arrests for drug sales).

Age. Older youth contribute a disproportionate share of juvenile arrests. Seventeen-year-olds accounted for 26% of all juvenile arrests, 26% of arrests for violent Index offenses, and 44% of drug arrests. Fifteen to seventeen-year-olds accounted for 69% of all juvenile arrests, 70% of arrests for violent Index offenses, and 90% of drug arrests. The youngest juveniles, youth 12 and under, accounted for 9% of all juvenile arrests, along with 8% of arrests for violent Index offenses, and 1% of drug arrests.

Juvenile Arrest Trends

Overall, there was a small decline (-2%) in the number of juvenile arrests in 2002 compared with the prior year. Over a ten-year period (1993 through 2002) there was a substantial downturn in juvenile arrests of 25%, alongside a growing youth population, with steady declines in arrests beginning in 1996 following an earlier rise. The pattern was similar for Index offenses with arrests declining 2% in 2002 compared with the prior year, and 45% for the ten-year period, with a steady decline also beginning in 1996. With regard to violent Index offenses, the number of arrests was virtually unchanged in 2002 compared with the prior year. Over the ten-year period, these arrests declined 39%, beginning in 1995 and continued to drop until 2001 when there was a small

increase of 3%. Finally, arrests for drug offenses declined 5% in 2002 compared with the prior year but rose 24% for the ten-year period. In this case, drug arrests grew rapidly through 1996 and declined steadily since.

Conclusion

The rapid rise in youth crime during the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly for violent offenses, has been followed by a fairly continuous and substantial decline. Rising youth crime was accompanied by higher rates of youth incarceration. As the data here suggest, the downward trend may be "bottoming out." Since 2000, the overall downward trend has slowed dramatically; and juvenile arrests for violent Index offenses have risen somewhat (up 3%). Furthermore, the youth population has been growing since the early 1990s and is expected to do so at least for the next few years. Significant to juvenile justice system policy makers and practitioners, county detention facility and JJC populations have not declined in any systematic way alongside the strong downward trend in arrests over the last several years. This should suggest that a leveling off or new rise in juvenile arrests over the coming years may lead to substantially higher numbers of incarcerated youth, particularly from urban areas.

TOTAL JUVENILE ARRESTS (All Offenses)

